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ABSTRACT

This document collects technical resources for assessing literacy among young children and the literacy environments of early childhood programs. Contents include: (1) a checklist for assessing the literacy environments of kindergartens; (2) an article on assessment and early literacy; (3) a discussion of basic aspects of the formal and informal assessment of young children in early childhood programs; (4) a matrix for delineating and comparing text characteristics; (5) a guide for observing role-playing behavior; (6) guidelines for conducting a listening and thinking activity; (7) a checklist for gathering data on students' cognition in literacy environments; (8) a list of "predictable storybooks"; (9) an outline of the procedure of echo reading; and (10) an outline of story retelling, which is an informal technique for evaluating children's language. Thirty-seven references are included. (RH)

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ASSESSMENT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Based on emergent literacy research, systematic developmental data should be keyed to these insights:

- **concepts of the functions and conventions of written language;**
- **text comprehension (ability to understand and recall books read to them);**
- **ability to read print commonly found in the home and community;**
- **emergent reading of storybooks;**

- **metalinguistic awareness (word and phonological awareness);**

- **emergent writing strategies (composing, spelling, and strategies for rereading their own writing);**

- **knowledge of letters, letter sounds, and the relations between them;**

Source: Teale, William H., "Developmentally Appropriate Assessment of Reading and Writing in the Early Childhood Classroom," The Elementary School Journal, Volume 89, Number 2, November, 1988, pp. 173-183.

Needs Assessment for Evaluating a Literate Environment in Kindergarten

Research has identified developmentally appropriate practices in exemplary kindergarten reading programs. The following checklist will help evaluate and plan a program in relationship to these recommended practices.

Yes	*No*	
___	___	The teacher is qualified to work with this age group through college preparation, staff development and/or supervised experienced.
___	___	Children are read to from a variety of resources on a frequent or daily basis.
___	___	Children are given numerous opportunities to verbally interact with peers and adults.
___	___	Instructional materials are familiar to the children.
___	___	Instruction provides for and enhances the varied learning styles of the children.
___	___	Children use a variety of manipulative materials.
___	___	The teacher encourages risk-taking in early attempts at reading and writing and has an accepting attitude toward errors as part of the initial learning process.
___	___	The learning environment is arranged to encourage exploration and independent learning without a great deal of direct adult intervention.
___	___	Assessment and evaluation of student progress is more dependent upon direct observation rather than use of worksheets or standardized tests.
___	___	Children engage in activities which require purposeful problem solving.
___	___	The teacher respects the language background the children bring to school and uses it initially as a base for language activities.
___	___	Learning activities are designed to develop children's self-esteem and encourage a positive attitude toward learning.
___	___	Children experience success in daily activities.
___	___	Learning activities emphasize children's active participation and exploration.

Yes	No	
___	___	Children have daily opportunities to participate in large muscle activities.
___	___	Children have daily opportunities to participate in small muscle activities such as painting, cutting, and the use of pegboards and blocks.
___	___	Children participate in activities which demonstrate the need for reading and writing.
___	___	Basic skill instruction occurs in meaningful situations rather than in isolated skill lessons.
___	___	Concept development is emphasized and based on prior knowledge of children.
___	___	Activities stress the integration of all subject areas.
___	___	The teacher works in partnership with parents by encouraging communication between home and school.
___	___	The teacher shares techniques that involve parents with their children in reading and related activities.
___	___	Children are engaged in a variety of creative and aesthetic opportunities.
___	___	Children work both individually and in small groups.
___	___	The teacher is a facilitator of learning rather than a giver of knowledge.
___	___	Both the physical and nutritional needs of the children are addressed.
___	___	Both the social and emotional needs of the children are addressed.
___	___	Children use a minimum of worksheets and workbook pages.
___	___	The instruction relates experiential backgrounds of the children to meaningful learning situations.
___	___	Rote memory, isolated skill instruction and drill are given minimum attention.
___	___	Play is used and valued in the teaching/learning process.
___	___	The teacher facilitates the development of intrinsic motivation and self control.
___	___	Children are encouraged to explore avenues of communication through such areas as visual arts, music, drama and dance.

Yes	*No*	
___	___	Children visit the school library on a regular basis to meet with the librarian and to check out books.
___	___	The teacher-pupil ratio is limited to enable individualized, small group and age appropriate programming.

National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1986) Good Teaching Practices for 4 and 5 Years Olds. Washington, D.C.: NAEYC.

International Reading Association. Literacy Development and Pre-First Grade. Newark, Delaware: IRA.

EMERGING READERS & WRITERS

Assessment and early literacy

Dorothy S. Strickland
Lesley Mandel Morrow

Miriam Cohen's picture storybook *First Grade Takes a Test* describes what happens when a group of young children encounter their first standardized test. In one segment a youngster named George looks at the first question that reads:

"Rabbits eat: lettuce _____, dog food _____, sandwiches _____."

George knows that rabbits need to eat carrots or their teeth will get too long. Since he can't find the correct answer, he draws in a carrot so the test people would know.

The policy statement of the International Reading Association on *Literacy Development and Pre-First Grade Reading* (IRA, 1985) suggests that evaluative procedures be developmentally and culturally appropriate and that their selection be based on the objectives of an instructional program. Standardized tests are the most commonly used measures in American schools today.

There are, however, numerous problems associated with them. (1) They are often used as the most important form of evaluation for determining whether children are promoted or retained. (2) They are given just once during a school year. (3) They focus on a narrow set of specific skills. (4) The test items allow for only one acceptable response. (5) The tests frequently do not reflect the skills and knowledge that are developing in young children, which we have learned about in the research on emerging literacy. (6) Tests are not sensitive to the development of personal characteristics of young children. Moreover, many youngsters cannot understand the directions for the test, some do not handle pencil and paper tasks well, and the whole group setting for testing can increase anxiety.

Teachers are dramatically affected by standardized tests. Their ability as teachers is often evaluated by how well their children perform, so they will often teach to the test, spending a great deal of class time in preparation. Since the test contents do not reflect much of the new literature which describes strategies for developing early literacy, as teachers teach for the test they are using inappropriate instruction. Yet if they don't teach for the test, their children may not score well. This presents a serious dilemma.

Assessment vs. testing

To deal with the problem, we need to understand the differences between testing and assessment and determine appropriate goals for evaluating children. A standardized measure is used to obtain evaluation information of a very specific type. The test evaluates children against prescribed expectations.

Assessment, on the other hand, is much broader and has several objectives. It is designed to match instruction and therefore evaluate children as to what they have been learning. The teacher looks at what has been learned, what needs to be learned, and how children are learning.

The information gained is used to design instruction for individuals. Assessment enhances teachers' competence as evaluators of student progress, since they are playing an active role in evaluation. Teachers assess using several methods such as observation, writing anecdotal records, and collecting performance samples. Data are collected frequently and with multiple measures. Teachers discuss children's progress with other teachers and support personnel to broaden their understanding. The measures used must go beyond artificial grade lines so that children are able to demonstrate all their abilities.

This form of informal assessment needs to be accepted by teachers, parents, and administrators as being just as important as standardized measures and possibly replace them (see "Assessing Young Children's Literacy Development" by William Teale, Elfrieda Hiebert, and Edward Chittenden in the April 87 RT, pp. 772-77).

What to assess and how

What should we assess? Assessment in early literacy should reflect the skills and knowledge that are developing in young children. We need to go beyond the testing for visual and auditory discrimination that is typical of current reading readiness tests.

Researchers have learned that as literacy emerges, children need to (1) learn the functions of reading and writing, (2) develop a sense of story structure and how to comprehend story, (3) make attempts at reading and writing in their own way prior to the emergence of conventional reading and writing.

Although this list is not complete, it touches on some of the knowledges that are developing in children that need to be evaluated.

How should we assess these behaviors? Daily occurrences in the classroom provide the best setting, since assessment and instruction can be

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linked. Teachers use varied assessment strategies as they observe behavior, keep anecdotal or continuous records about children, collect daily performance samples that provide tangible evidence of progress, interview children and discuss literacy activities, fill out checklists, and tape activities that can demonstrate growth.

Assessment settings are thus varied in type and context, are used continuously during the school year, and focus on a variety of behaviors. This sort of assessment ensures that at least some measures will be appropriate for children with varied cultural backgrounds and ability levels.

Behavior samples

Here are examples of situations in which teachers used different assessment contexts. They reveal how much can be learned about children's progress, how children learn, and how teachers become expert in learning about the children.

During a story reading with a small group in which interactive dialogue was encouraged, one teacher learned a great deal about Katie's understanding of story. In the book *Caps for Sale* monkeys take caps from a peddler while he sleeps. He tries to get the caps back by asking the monkeys for them, but each time they just imitate him and don't return the caps.

Teacher: "By this time the peddler was really very angry. He stamped both his feet and shouted 'You monkeys, you! You must give me back my caps!"

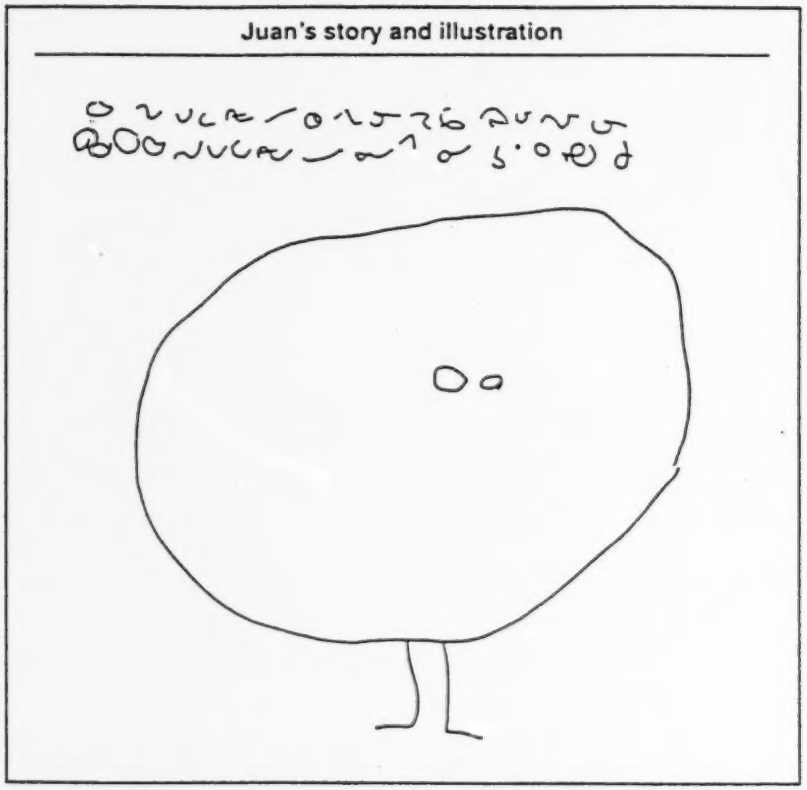
Katie: "I know what will happen. The monkeys will just stamp their feet like the peddler and say 'tsz, tsz, tsz.' "

Teacher: "Katie, that's exactly right. I'll read it to you: 'But the monkeys only stamped both their feet back at him and said, tsz, tsz, tsz.' "

Katie offered an interpretive response during this story reading. She predicted what would come next, based on her understanding of what had already happened. The teacher recorded this as part of her running records so she could plan appropriate instruction for Katie's level of understanding.

Four year old Juan read his story to the teacher. His paper had an illustration and the story was written in letterlike forms. From this performance sample, his teacher learned that Juan knew the difference between pictures and print and the functions of each even though his writing was not yet conventional (see Figure).

Juan's story and illustration



From Literacy Development in the Early Years: Helping Children Read and Write by Lesley Mandel Morrow, p. 152. Reprinted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

An interview with Ivory, who was in a classroom where emergent reading strategies were incorporated, revealed that she understood a great deal about the knowledge necessary to read. She was asked how she was learning to read.

Ivory: "Well, first the teacher reads lots of books to us and she always says the author and the illustrator and the title. She makes sure you can see the pictures and she points to the words with the big books so you know the words she is reading. The teacher lets you try reading books that you know. I do it like she does, I look at the pictures, sometimes I can read a word."

These informal assessments demonstrate that through observation, recording anecdotes, reviewing performance samples, and interviewing, teachers can learn a great deal about children's emergent reading abilities.

This series is prepared by Dorothy Strickland of Teachers College/Columbia University and Lesley Mandel Morrow of Rutgers University. Send comments to Dorothy Strickland, Teachers College Box 135, Columbia University, New York NY 10027, USA.

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Formal instruments provide a measure of what a child is capable of doing.

Informal assessments provide a way of finding out what a child actually does.

INFORMAL ASSESSMENTS

Spontaneous samples

Structured activities

Direct observational techniques

Checklists

Anecdotal records

Portfolios of children's writings

Recordings of their reading

Assessments with learning opportunities

WHY MEASURE YOUNG CHILDREN?

GUIDANCE: Make educational choices for individuals and/or programs

ADMINISTRATION: Make decisions on selection, placement of students

INSTRUCTION: Make choices on appropriate methods, materials, and approaches

RESEARCH: Gather data for all above areas

EARLY CHILDHOOD ASSESSMENT

Special Issues

Characteristics of young children that make assessment difficult

Measurement problems

Selection of instruments

Examples of formal and informal instruments

Standardized tests

Assessment with learning opportunities

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG CHILDREN THAT MAKE ASSESSMENT DIFFICULT

Lack Test-Taking Skills

- Can't read
- Can't pace themselves
- Can't use machine answer sheets

Performance Particularly Susceptible To Extraneous Influences

- Physical condition (hungry or tired)
- Motivational level
- Tester

Developing Rapidly

- Tasks appropriate at beginning of year may be inappropriate at the end
- Low consistency among scores from successive testings

PURPOSE

PLACEMENT

DIAGNOSIS

PUPIL GROWTH

PREDICT SUCCESS

PROGRAM EVALUATION

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

PEOPLE

Curriculum Match

Implication for Instruction

Appropriate administration for young children

Answer sheets

Time to administer

Group or individual

Integration with on-going instruction

Assessment with learning opportunities

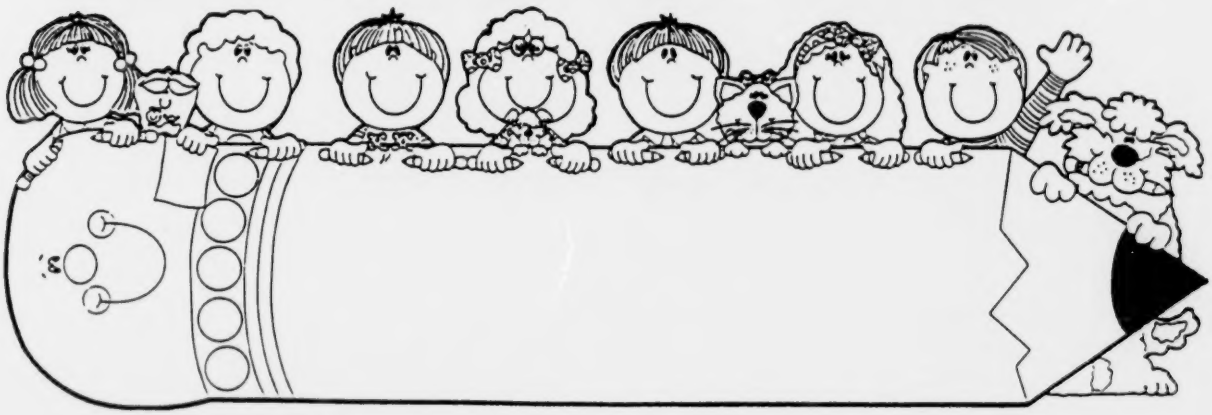
Appropriate to children's culture

TECHNICAL QUALITIES

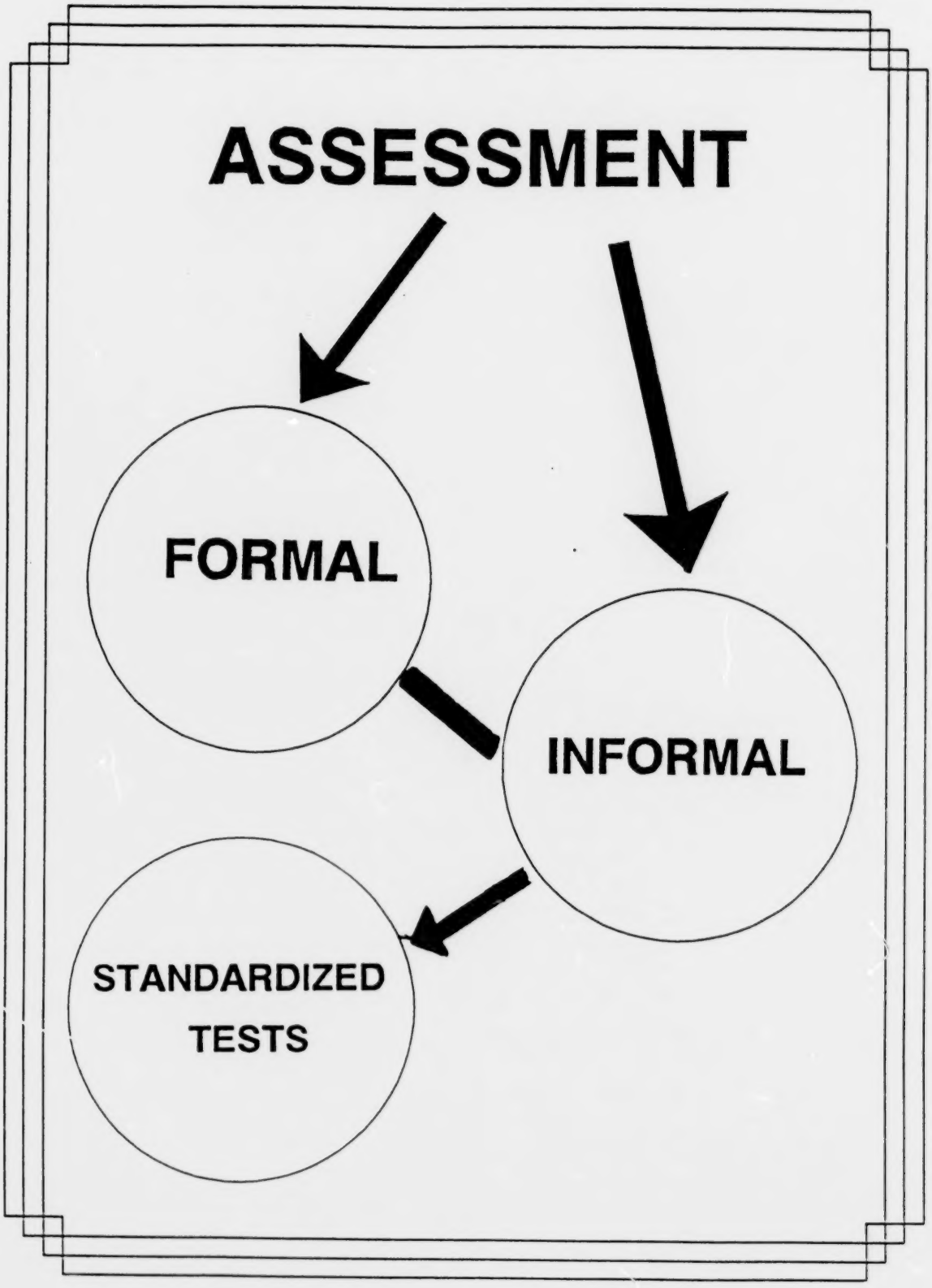
---

* RELIABILITY
* VALIDITY
* NORMS
* TABLES
* EASE OF SCORING
* MANUAL
* TRYING THE TEST OUT

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEST ADMINISTRATION



- Administer tests individually or in small groups
- Make sure directions are clearly understood
- Make response format as simple as possible


ASSESSMENT
FORMAL
INFORMAL
STANDARDIZED
TESTS

STANDARDIZED TESTS

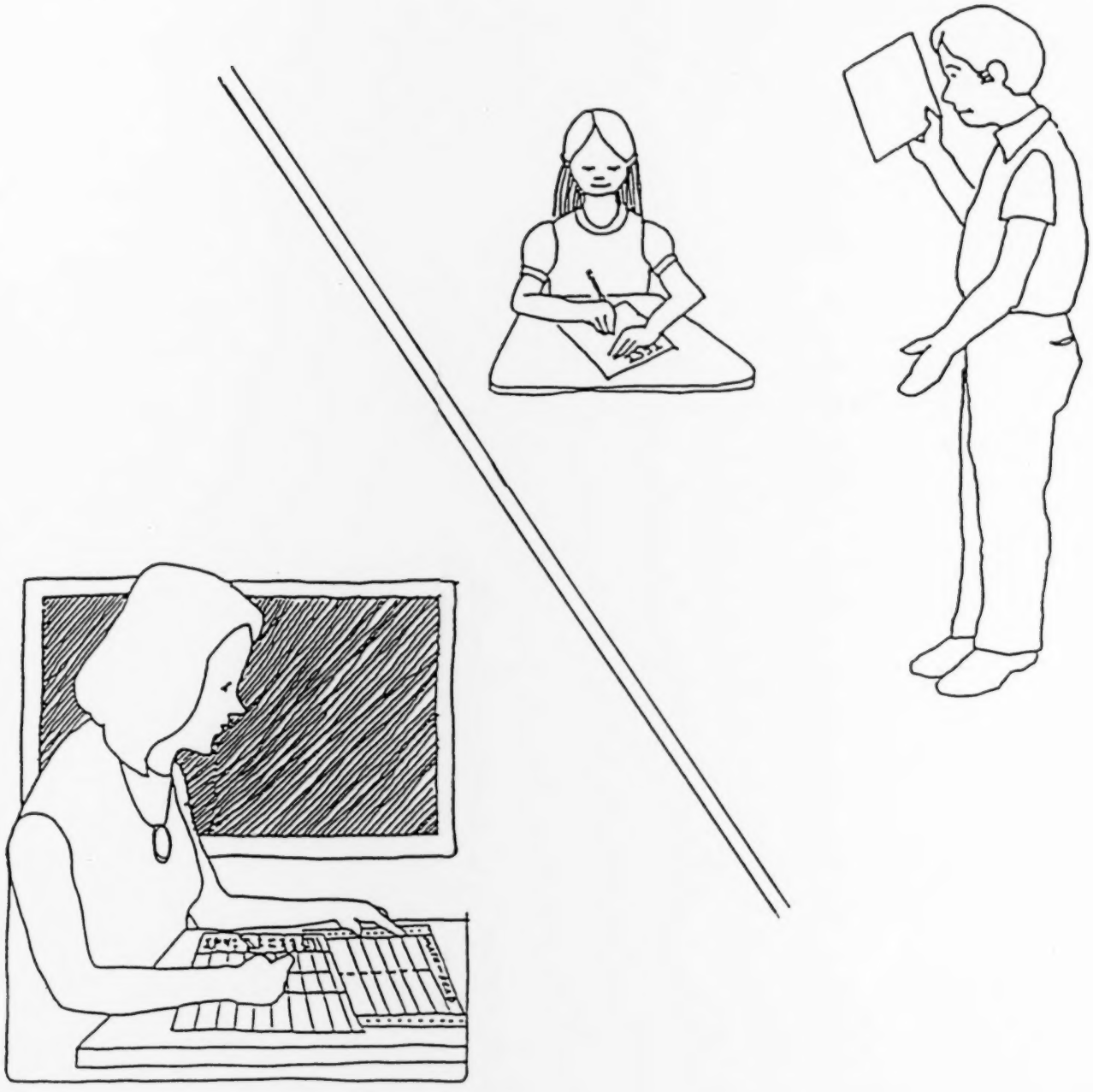
- Cognitive and Psychomotor Tests
- Published General Aptitude Tests
- Published Tests of Preacademic Skills, School Readiness, or School Achievement
- Diagnostic Tests
- Locally Developed Tests
- Affective Domain Tests

Factors to Consider in the Selection of Early Childhood Tests	Name of Test			
Type				
Aptitude				
Readiness				
Achievement				
Diagnostic				
Affective				
Other				
Purpose				
Placement in special programs				
Placement in set of materials				
Diagnosis of individual strengths and weaknesses				
Illustrate pupil growth over a period of time				
Predict success in future (readiness)				
Program evaluation				
People				
Curriculum/test match				
Appropriate administration for young children (separate answer sheet)				
Group or individual				
Assessment integrated with on-going instruction				
Content and form appropriate to children's culture				
Technical Qualities				
Reliability				
Validity				
Norms				
Scoring consideration				

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

- Observational Checklist of Skills and Behaviors
- Anecdotal Records - Background Information
- Selected Samples of Children's Work
- Assessment with Learning Opportunities

TEACHER JUDGMENT



ROLE-PLAY OBSERVATION GUIDE

CHILD: _____
ACTIVITY: _____

Observing a role play episode, do you see the children doing the following?

Pretending to be someone else

Sharing with others

Using one object (prop) to stand for another

Using action and sounds as substitutes for the real thing

Using words to represent a make-believe situation or setting

Talking with others within the context of the role playing

NOTES

DICTATED EXPERIENCE

STORIES

Story Starter

Writing The Story

Development

ASSESSMENT

Speak in sentences, single words, word clusters

Use of descriptive names for objects rather than ambiguous terms like "It"

Speech distinct or mumbled

Generative Language Skills Test

Variety of Oral Language

Child is asked to describe increasingly complex pictures. Tally sheet for specific words.

Quantity of Oral Language

Number of words used by the child is the criterion.

Accuracy of Oral Language

Note the accuracy or correctness of receptive and expressive language.

INFORMAL

ASSESSMENT

DESIRED OUTCOMES

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT: OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST OF SKILLS AND BEHAVIORS

THE DIRECTED LISTENING-THINKING ACTIVITY

This activity is an assessment technique that also teaches. It fits well into the instructional routine of the classroom because of the predictive questioning it utilizes. It was developed by Russell Stauffer in 1980.*

MATERIALS

A library book (can be a picture book) that has a strong plot with an initiating event and an outcome or consequences.

PROCEDURE

As the teacher reads the story aloud, she pauses at several points just before an important event. She then asks the students to predict or guess what they think might happen next in the story to summarize what has previously happened and to find out what information they still need to know. The purpose of this procedure is to encourage the children to hypothesize about what seems most likely to happen. The teacher should readily accept all predictions even if some of them turn out to be incorrect.

This activity can be done with an individual, small group or a whole class. A group session usually provides a more lively sharing of ideas.

ASSESSMENT OF DIRECTED LISTENING-THINKING ACTIVITY

An important part of prereading skills is the ability to sense the structure of a story and use it to predict upcoming events. The teacher should assess this ability by keeping the following questions in mind.**

1. When you announce the activity, which children come quickly and enthusiastically to the circle? Which ones do not? Over a number of trials, this is an indicator of expectations and attitudes toward books and reading.

2. When shown the cover or illustration of a book, do the children expect the cover to contain clues to the story? Do they expect the title to contain clues? Do they expect the pictures to give information? Their comments and predictions will reveal whether they have such expectations.

3. After a part of the story has been read and they are asked to make predictions:

   a. Do they make any predictions at all?

   b. If so, are their predictions
      1. wild and random?
      2. based on what might happen in real life?
      3. based on story logic and story structures?

   c. Can they give a reason or justification for their prediction?

*Stauffer, R.G. (1980, rev. ed.) The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper & Row.

**Gillet, J.W. and Temple, C. (1982) Understanding Reading Problems: Assessment and Instruction. Source of Questions. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 62.

SAMPLE DATA CHECKLIST

STUDENT: _____

Offers Spontaneous Predictions			
Predictions Show Awareness of Story Structures			
Changes Predictions When Necessary			
Can Justify Predictions from Text			
Uses Both Explicit and Implicit Information			
Shows Original Thinking			
Uses Context to Analyze New Words			

PREDICTABLE STORYBOOKS

1. Adams, P., This Old Man.
2. Boone, R. and Mills, A., I Know an Old Lady.
3. Brown, M., Four Fur Feet.
4. Brown, M., Goodnight Moon.
5. Brown, M., Home for Bunny.
6. Brown, M., Runaway Bunny.
7. Brown, M., The Three Billy Goats Gruff.
8. Carle, E., Get Me The Moon.
9. Carle, E., The Grouchy Ladybug.
10. Carle, E., The Very Hungry Caterpillar.
11. Flack, M., Ask Mr. Bear.
12. Gag, W., Millions of Cats.
13. Hutchins, P., Good Night, Owl!.
14. Hutchins, P., Rosie's Walk.
15. Keats, E.J., Over in the Meadow.
16. Keats, E.J., Regards to the Man in the Moon.
17. Keats, E.J., The Snowy Day.
18. Kraus, R., Whose Mouse Are You?
19. Langstaff, J., Frog Went a Courtin'.
20. Langstaff, J., Oh, A Hunting We Will Go.
21. Martin, B., Brown Bear, Brown Bear.

22. Martin, B., Fire! Fire! Said Mrs. McGuire.

23. McGovern, A., Too Much Noise.

24. Sendak, M., Where the Wild Things Are.

25. Shaw, C., It Looked Like Split Milk.

26. Skaar, G., What Do the Animals Say?

27. Tolstoy, A., The Great Big Enormous Turnip.

*Stauffer, R.G. (1980, rev. ed.) The Language Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper & Row.

**Gillet, J.W. and Temple, C. (1982) Understanding Reading Problems: Assessment and Instruction. Source of Questions. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, p. 62.

ECHO READING*

The procedure for echo reading is as follows:

MATERIALS

Select an eight-line passage from a book written at approximately a first-grade level. To record the echo reading, make a copy of the lines. To keep records on several students, type the lines, triple spaced, and duplicate a copy for each student.

PROCEDURE

1. Sit down with one student at a time in a place that is relatively free of distractions.
2. Explain that you will read the lines aloud and that as you do so you want the student to repeat the words you have just read, exactly as you read them.
3. Read a line clearly, stop, and have the student echo it.
4. Repeat for each of the eight lines.
5. As the student echoes, record his or her words on your copy. You may find it convenient to tape record these sessions and score the echo reading later.

Code the echo reading as follows:

1. Place a check mark (✓) over each word repeated correctly.
2. Circle words, word parts, or phrases that are omitted.
3. Write in words substituted for those in the line and draw a line through the words that were not repeated.
4. Write in words inserted in the line; use a caret (^) to indicate where the insertion was made.

Here are some example sentences:

My new red wagon has (four shiny) red wheels. (correct and omission)

My ~~brother~~ friend and I pull ^ that things in it. (correct, substitution and insertion)

Why is the ability to repeat sentences important? It is a curious fact of language development that children cannot accurately repeat a sentence that is more syntactically advanced than one they can produce spontaneously.

If you ask children to repeat a sentence more complicated than one they can produce themselves, they will normally simplify the sentence in the repeated version (Slobin and Welsh, 1971). Here, for example, are some sentence repetitions by young children between two and four years.

1. Adult: Like at the doggy.
   Child: Doggy
2. Adult: This boy is all wet.
   Child: Boy all wet.

3. Adult: The new bike and roller skates are over there.
   Child: A new bikes are there and a skates are over there.

The link between children's ability to imitate sentences and the limits of their syntactical ability is fortuitous for language assessment. It enables us to get an idea of the limits of the complexity of their sentences by asking them to repeat sentences we read to them. Thus the method of echo reading can indicate whether a child's syntax is sufficiently developed to encompass the sentence patterns encountered in reading books written on a given level. Experience tells us that if the language patterns of a book do not lie within the children's control, they will be at a disadvantage in reading that book. And occasionally, reading teachers encounter children whose syntax is not adequate enough for any but the simplest books.

What to Look for in Echo Reading

One or two words deleted or substituted per sentence are not a cause for alarm, especially if the child substituted a familiar for a less familiar word such as "store" for "shop." Similarly, if the child leaves off grammatical endings, plural markers on nouns, or tense markers on verbs, it is considered normal if he or she belongs to a dialect group that usually omits these endings. If, however, the child regularly leaves out important words or rewords whole phrases, it is more serious. In the examples above, 1 and 2 show important elements omitted.

The important thing here is to find out what the children can do once the limits of their syntactic development have been found--that is, the length and type of sentence where their repetition falls below about 80 percent of the words, dialectical variances excluded. In these cases, their language in response to books will have to be drawn out before reading instruction can successfully proceed. Songs, poems, rhythm games and chants, and dictated experience stories should all be used lavishly, as well as any simple books with a pattern (a rhyming or rhythmic element, as many books for young children have).

Gillet, Jean Wallace and Temple, Charles. (1982) Understanding Reading Problems: Assessment and Instruction. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.

Story Retelling: An Informal Technique For Evaluating Children's Language*

Story retelling is an informal approach to assess children's language. The following skills can be evaluated by utilizing this technique:

1. comprehension (understanding of grammatical forms and vocabulary words);
2. organization (ability to integrate visual and auditory information and to recall sequence of events);
3. expression (expressing the story in fluent, connected sentences using correct grammatical forms).

Instruction: Select a story with a simple plot. The story should have comprehensible sentences but the sentences should be too long to be memorized. The teacher tells a short story to an individual student in a quiet place. The child is then asked to retell the story. The child's version is taped and/or written down, and analyzed at a later time.

Sample Story (adapted from a fable):

This is a story about a grasshopper and an ant.
The grasshopper sat in the sunshine and played all summer long.
The ant was working hard gathering food for the winter.
When winter came, the hungry grasshopper asked the ant for food.
The ant said, "You played all summer so now you must go hungry."

Child's Version #1:

The grasshopper -- an ant -- look for food.
Working all day.
The grasshopper went into ant house.
Work all day.
Go for food.
Guess that's all.

Child's Version #2:

The grasshopper was sitting in the sun.
And winter came.
And he was hungry for food.
And went into the ant's house.
And asked him for food.
And that is the end of the story.

Child's Version #3:

There was a grasshopper and one ant.
And winter came.
And he asked him for food.
And then the grasshopper had to go hungry.

Child's Version #4:

The Grasshopper and the Ant.
All the summer days the Grasshopper singed.
One snowy day the grasshopper came into his house.
And he said he wanted food.
Then the ant said, "You have singing all summertime."
And then he fixed food for him.
Then the ant said, "You can't come food."

All of the children's stories contain a variety of errors. However, as Picket and Chase emphasize, the point is not that the stories contain errors, "but that in order to help children develop language skills, teachers must be aware of the language abilities of their students."

Picket, Sarah M. and Chase, Martha L. (1978, February) "Story Retelling: An Informal Technique for Evaluating Children's Language," The Reading Teacher. Vol 31, #5.

NO SINGLE SOURCE OF INFORMATION IS SUFFICIENT.

A TOTAL PROGRAM FOR INSTRUCTION IN THE EARLY YEARS MUST DRAW UPON MANY SOURCES, INCLUDING TEACHER OBSERVATION, PARENT CONFERENCES, AND TEST RESULTS.

ASSESSMENT ADVICE

- Seek a Balance between once-a-year (too little) and continuous (usually unfeasible) assessment.
- Manage data professionally and confidentially.
- Report candidly to parents.
- Use evaluation data to improve early childhood programs.

References and Resources

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